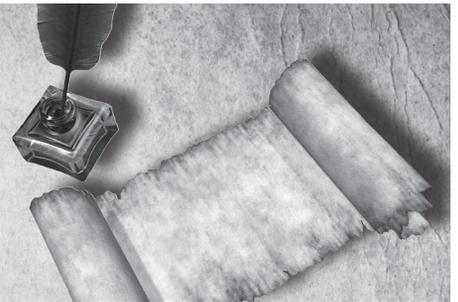


# HISTORIAN'S DIGEST



Volume 53, Number 3

Summer, 2013



HSUMC President Dan Swinson

## Final Letter from our Current President, Daniel Swinson

Rutherford B. Hayes was a nihilist. From the Latin word for “nothing,” Nihilism is defined as an extreme skepticism that denies all existence and meaning, all laws and constraints. It is usually associated with philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre and, especially, Friedrich Nietzsche. Methodists of Hayes’ day would have considered it among the worst forms of atheism. Yet, Rutherford B. Hayes was a self-described nihilist. And Methodism was at least part of the reason why.

At the meeting of the North Central Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History in Canton, Ohio, Christie Weininger, Executive Director of the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center in Fremont, Ohio, described Hayes’ religious views and his complicated relationship to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

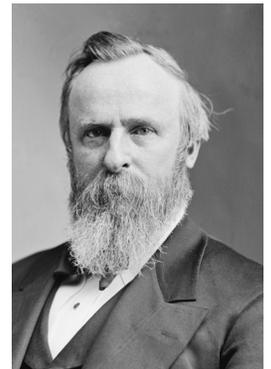
Raised Presbyterian, Hayes was inclined to skepticism. He was one of only nine holdouts unconverted after a revival at Kenyon College. He confirmed his beliefs in Boston as he studied at Harvard Law School. He called Ralph Waldo Emerson the priest of his religion. He found radical Unitarian Theodore Parker’s criticism of revealed religion exhilarating. He admitted being “so nearly infidel in all my views” that “none but the most liberal doctrines can command my assent” (Ari Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Warrior & President*, 83).

Scholars generally see Hayes’ connection to the Methodist Episcopal Church mediated by his wife, Lucy Hayes. He attended the Foundry Methodist Episcopal Church while President, holding office there and in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Fremont, Ohio, both of which he supported generously. This, despite the fact that he never joined, never claimed strong Methodist views, and never agreed with orthodox formulations. His late life reflections hoping for a reunion with Lucy breathe the spirit of his beloved Emerson, and recognize that he could hardly be called a devout Christian. In explaining Hayes’ claim to nihilism, however, Executive Director Weininger points in part to Emerson, in part to reformers like Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* influenced Hayes, in part to the emerging Social Gospel movement, and in part to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Such a combination would have baffled Nietzsche, but made sense to Hayes. He was called a nihilist for saying

that “property is a trust for the welfare of the public.” This may well have been an effort to tar Hayes with the brush of the Russian political nihilists who sought the overthrow of all social structures. Hayes held no such views. He had deep concern for the disparity of wealth in the Gilded Age. He favored legislation that would have effectively redistributed that wealth. He did not favor the programs of socialism or communism. He preferred to speak of his nihilism.

He was not being contrarian. In a paper describing Hayes’ view, Colin D. Pierce notes the influence of Emerson’s *Representative Men: Seven Lectures*, where greatness is a devotion to “facts and thoughts” that allows great and powerful people to “abolish” themselves “and all heroes.” The commonwealth of humanity, including the use of property “for the welfare of the public,” replaces the egotism of personal glory. For Hayes, this nihilism was also the genius of the Declaration of Independence and of the Sermon on the Mount.



Pres. Rutherford B. Hayes

In her presentation, Weininger saw another clue to Hayes’ nihilism—the second great commandment. She found that love of neighbor, especially as articulated in the ministry of Foundry M. E. Church, may have been part of Hayes nihilism. In a way, Hayes’ nihilism was living out Wesley’s rubrics to do no harm and to do all the good you can.

If the problem with Hayes’ nihilism is that dictionary definitions of the word are not broad enough to cover his particular brand, there is a similar problem with seeing Methodism as a source of that brand. Biographies of Hayes and that other, more formally Methodist President from Ohio, William McKinley, continue to promote a view of Methodism as revivalist, orthodox, anti-intellectual, and politically complicit in, or else naïve regarding the extremes of late nineteenth century capitalism. These Presidents have emerged somewhat from such criticisms. Hayes had his nihilism. McKinley as governor of Ohio instituted collective bargaining because of his concern for working people (his state was only the second to do so). Methodism unfortunately has not benefited from this revision, at least among the historians and biographers of the Presidents of the Gilded Age.

(cont. bottom pg. 2)

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*Historian's Digest* is published quarterly by the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church.

## From Our New President-elect, Russell Richey

Greetings. And a word of thanks to you the members of the Historical Society for entrusting me with the presidential office. Having been away from the inner-workings of the HS for a number of years, I will have much on which to catch up and look forward to guidance from any and all who have counsel on the organization's future.

I do enter the office with some assumptions about the importance of history and historians to the well-being of the people called Methodist. Indeed, I have argued in several places that in attesting to who they are and what they are about, Methodists have conventionally resorted to history. Their first word about themselves has been an historical one. So beginning in 1787 when American Methodists abandoned John Wesley's "Large" Minutes format for its *Discipline* and rearranged the sections "under proper Heads" and methodized it "in a more acceptable and easy Manner," they put a short, providential historical-theological account up front. In a three part narrative apologetic, Methodism rendered an historical defense of the movement—

"What was the Rise of Methodism, so called in Europe?"

"What was the Rise of Methodism, so called in America?"

"What may we reasonably believe to be God's Design, in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?"

History seemed like such an obvious first word that thereafter new Methodist movements have introduced themselves with a historical preface. Readers of our *The Methodist Experience in America: A History* will have encountered the one just cited and also those for the United Brethren, Evangelical Association, Methodist Protestants and MECS. Space considerations led us (Kenneth Rowe, Jean Miller Schmidt and me) to omit others that we had wanted to include—those for Republican Methodists, AME and AMEZ churches, the Wesleyans, Free Methodists, the CME and Nazarenes. Each of these historical prefaces explained the new denomination. And today as well, United Methodism puts a long historical introduction close to the front of the *Discipline*.

So United Methodism needs to have its story told and told well. It needs its historians. And it needs GCAH and the Historical Society. We may need to remind the church that it needs us. I look forward to making that case and hope you will join me enthusiastically in such a cause.

Again, greetings.  
Russell Richey



Dr. Russell Richey

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Late nineteenth century Methodism had the complexity to influence Hayes in the direction of his nihilism. Such Methodism valued reason and the moral life. It was shared more formally by Lucy Hayes (who was not as distressed by her husband's skepticism as Julia Grant was by Ulysses'), and was a growing part of what Richey, Rowe, and Miller Schmidt describe as the nurturing phase of Methodism in America. The popularity of preachers like Hiram W. Thomas of the Rock River Conference, the Boston Personalism of Borden Parker Bowne, the higher criticism of H. T. Mitchell, the reform work of Frances Willard, the activities that would lead before long to the Social Creed, alert us that there may not have been as great a gulf between Hayes and a significant portion of the Methodist Episcopal Church as most historians assume.

Weininger's insights into Hayes' unique nihilism remind us that the picture is more complicated. So, the next time you hear the standard scoop about Hayes' relationship with the Methodist Episcopal Church, bring up his nihilism and its background.

The world is a curious place.

Peace,  
Dan Swinson

## From the General Secretary, Bob Williams

A new book recently arrived at the Methodist Archives Center and Library is *The Letters of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition, with Introduction and Notes*, Volume 1, 1728-1756, edited by Kenneth G. C. Newport and Gareth Lloyd, Oxford University Press. It is not the type of book you pick up and try to read through even though that is what I am trying to do and it is one that, unfortunately, is out of the price range of most of us at \$225. Volume 2 will contain letters from 1757 to 1788 but I don't know the publication date. This is not intended to be a review but I have found it quite interesting. It is an extraordinary work of research and editing with copious annotations and notes. Charles is revealed in ways that are not available in secondary biographies. We are reaping the benefits of primary source materials on Charles Wesley being published such as a critical edition of Charles's sermons edited by Kenneth Newport, *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.*, edited by S T Kimbrough, Jr. and Kenneth G. C. Newport (Kingswood Press), and soon to be published the journal letters of Charles, edited by Richard Heitzenrater. A few selections from Charles' letters may be of interest.

In 1741, Charles wrote to Ursula, the widow of his oldest brother, Samuel, about her spiritual life:

*I speak not this to upbraid you. No; was it not for your great affection to me, you would be much more prejudiced than you are. But, by nature we are averse to the things of God. We are born unbelievers; and have not faith till we are born again. This is a hard saying (and yet a kind one) that you, my dear sister, are not yet born again...If you have not experienced this change, there stand an impossibility betwixt you and salvation (page 97).*

From the introduction we find, "Charles writes exactly what he thinks—in one letter dated August 1783 he comments to his wife that John Wesley was preaching in Bristol, before adding the somewhat critical but telling comment: 'I never knew a wise, good man, SO FOND OF BEING heard as he is'" (page 18).

But on a more uplifting note, Charles wrote in a letter in 1741 to his brother John, "I wish all that labour in Xt's (Charles' form) vineyard were entirely of one heart, & one mind & one judgement. (Charles' spelling) I wish we may all love one another—so shall we be disciples of Jesus" (page 94).

Primary sources seemed to reveal glimpses that secondary sources cannot. To all archivists and historians, we offer our thanks for all you do to enlighten the present with the experiences of the past.

### Job Announcement: General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History

The General Commission on Archives and History announces its search to fill the position of General Secretary. The current General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Robert Williams, will complete his term and we anticipate a transition in this role as early as April 1st or as late as July 1st, 2014. The person selected to fill this upcoming vacancy must be a professing member of The United Methodist Church in accordance with ¶715.5 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2012*.

The General Secretary serves as the chief executive officer of the General Commission on Archives and History whose primary responsibility is "to promote and care for the historical interests of The United Methodist Church at every level." (¶1703.1, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2012*). In addition, essential to this position is the active interpretation of our history for relevant application to our modern context, our ecclesial challenges, and the forward progression of our denomination. Extensive travel and public speaking are required by this position.

The Search Committee is committed to a process that takes into consideration the global nature of The United Methodist Church. The process will be racially and gender inclusive, wide-ranging, and one which provides equal opportunity for all persons with the needed gifts and graces for the position. A Ph.D. is preferred, but not required. We seek your assistance in distributing this job announcement widely so that the best potential candidates might be informed and invited to apply.

Job description and application are currently available at: [www.susumc.org/GCAH](http://www.susumc.org/GCAH). Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be emailed in confidence to: [gcah@susumc.org](mailto:gcah@susumc.org).

**The deadline for receipt of all applications is September 1, 2013**

# 2013 Saddlebag Selection Announced

The Historical Society of the United Methodist Church annually announces its "Saddlebag Selection," a recognition of the best book in United Methodist history, biography, theology, or polity published during the preceding calendar year. Among the criteria for the award are that the winner would be "respectable and readable, serious and accessible," achieving a balance between the scholarly and the popular."

The Society is pleased to announce that the judges' choice for works published in 2012 is Volume 12 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* series, said volume entitled *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, edited by Dr. Randy L. Maddox. It is intended that this award will honor and highlight not only the current volume, but the entire series – past, present, and future. The overall series is edited by Dr. Richard P. Heitzenrater.

This volume is one of the most useful of the series for those who are interested in Wesley's theological stances in the context of the philosophical climate of his time. The volume focuses particularly on the heart of Wesleyan theological thinking, his soteriology, and further emphasizes his Anglican roots. Maddox's selections, his organization, and his explanatory notes in this volume are emblematic of his distinguished scholarship in the field.

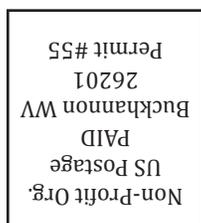
The award will be presented at the annual meeting of the Society in Madison, NJ, September 14-16, 2013.

Previous Saddlebag Selections represent some of the most distinguished recent works on the story of the United Methodist Church and its ecclesiastical antecedents. They include Robert Bray's *Peter Cartwright: Legendary Frontier Preacher*; Rex Matthews' *Timetables of History for Students of Methodism*; John Wigger's *Francis Asbury and the Methodists*; *The Methodist Experience in America: A History* by Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt; and last year's winner, *The Poisoned Chalice* by Jennifer Woodruff Tait.

Judges for this year's competition were Linda Schramm of Michigan, Lyle Johnston of Arizona, Charles Yrigoyen Jr. of Pennsylvania, and Rob Sledge of Texas, coordinator.

Robert W. Sledge, Ph.D.

Saddlebag Selection Coordinator



Historian's Digest  
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